

## **Christmas Does Not Always Bring Holiday Cheer**

Tuesday, December 14, 2010

Christmas brings with it holiday cheer for some but not all. The Christmas season can be very stressful with all the planning, decorating, etc. Christmas is particularly stressful for those who are in divorced families for different reasons. This post will attempt to provide some guidance.

First, there should be a written plan in place which spells out where the child is to go during the Christmas holiday. If there are older children involved, they should be included in the discussion. This discussion may not be possible for a particularly contentious divorce.

Second, parents need to set aside settling old scores and remember that the holiday season is about the children. And lastly, the non-custodial parent should coordinate concerning the child's Christmas list with the custodial parent.

Concerning visitation, each parent must go into the holiday season with an open mind. They must realize that they are not going to spend as much time with the child during the holidays; mostly because there are grandparents, aunts, and uncles that want to see the child. If a holiday falls on their assigned visitation day, they should not monopolize the child's holiday. To avoid confusion for the child and the chaos of going back and forth on one day, perhaps the parents can arrange an alternate holiday schedule. For example, one year a child would spend the entire Thanksgiving with one parent and the next year would switch to the other parent. This avoids the child being shuffled from place to place. Remember when you were married and how difficult it was to coordinate holidays with your in-laws; now your child is in that position.

The important thing to remember is that Christmas is about the children. This means do whatever you can to get along with your former spouse, remembering all the positive times you shared as a family. This can be done by celebrating old traditions and creating new ones. If it is an amicable divorce, perhaps you could arrange a mutual place to have dinner. This creates a sense of normalcy for the child who is experiencing a different Christmas. Above all, make the Christmas season a positive experience for the child.

And last but not least, coordinate regarding gift giving. This is important for two reasons, first because coordination will eliminate duplicate gift giving and second the non-custodial parent tends to over-buy for the child. The non-custodial parent because of feelings of guilt of not being able to be there for the child during Christmas, will tend to over-buy for the child. This over-purchasing will spoil the child and lead to resentment because the child will come to expect pricier gifts from the non-custodial parent. The most important thing is to not turn the Christmas season into a gift giving competition.

I hope this article provides some guidance thru an extremely painful and difficult holiday season for families that are divorced. With clear communication and a defined plan, the holidays can be far more joyous and less stressful.